



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

13 March 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable William H. Sullivan
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State
for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

SUBJECT : Political Offensive Paper

1. Attached for your use and information is the final version of the political offensive paper. With some reluctance, I have dropped "atrophied disrepair" and substituted a slightly watered down form of USIA's lily gilding. I have also incorporated most of the suggestions offered by our colleagues in the Department.

2. Since this is a paper devoted to objectives, targets and themes -- explicitly eschewing implementing techniques and programs -- I have not said anything about the obvious need for coordinating many actual programs undertaken with the GVN. Nor have I included an inventory of current assets and activities since a compendium of these is already available to the White House in other recent documents.

[Redacted]

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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Attachment

cc:

[Redacted]

DCI/ SAVA:GACarver/mee

1 - DDCI/ER

1 - D/OCI

1 - C/OCI/VTF

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1 - [Redacted]

1 - DDP

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1 - Misc. Psych Proj.

1 - GAC Chrono ✓

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Themes and Ground Rules for a Political Offensive
Against North Vietnam

1. For several reasons this is an opportune time to review the bidding on the U.S. Government's propaganda and psychological warfare efforts against the Vietnamese Communist Party and against the Party's current policy of using extensive armed force in an effort to impose its control over South Vietnam. In the aftermath of Ho's death, the Hanoi leadership picture at the Politburo level is unsettled. There are some signs of personal rivalries and policy differences among Ho's former subordinates, who have not yet agreed on which of their number will be Ho's successor. There are also some signs of a rise in war weariness and general fatigue among the population of North Vietnam and signs of increasingly frayed morale among some segments of the Communists' military and political apparatus in the south. In the aggregate, the trends of the past year or so have not been favorable to Communist interests; and this fact seems to be recognized at the command levels of the Party's hierarchy.

2. The Party leadership still projects an air of confidence about "ultimate victory," but this is probably a concept so theologically rooted in doctrinal outlook that it is not open to serious debate, certainly not to public discussion. Despite this public posture of confidence, however, the Politburo is clearly troubled by many facets of the current situation, including trends on the ground in South Vietnam, the decline in the decibel count of opposition to the war within the United States, President Nixon's policy of "Vietnamization," and the firm U.S. negotiating posture in Paris. At this juncture, the Politburo seems somewhat perplexed and uncertain about the Party's optimum course of action in the months ahead. Similar perplexities and uncertainties also seem to be manifest to some extent at almost every level of the Party hierarchy.

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3. The White House has recently requested a review of all propaganda and political action activities, both overt and covert, capable of undermining enemy will and morale in both North and South Vietnam. We also understand that the President is personally interested in having such activities increased across the board. Thus highest level interest as well as the external facts of the Vietnam situation itself make this the time for a fresh look at this whole subject.

4. Ideas in this field abound and a number of separate activities are and long have been already in train, under the aegis of several separate Executive Branch components. The machinery in Washington and within the U.S. Mission in Vietnam designed to insure coordination of U.S. propaganda and psychological warfare efforts is being revived and invigorated to develop an institutional mechanism capable of initiating and monitoring an integrated propaganda and psychological warfare program whose component parts are deliberately tailored to be mutually reinforcing and complementary.

5. A helpful first step in stimulating the kind of effective intensified effort we believe the President wants would be the adoption or acceptance by all parties concerned of an agreed basic set of objectives, targets and authorized themes. Such a set of authorized common guidelines would provide common benchmarks against which the individual programs of various U.S. Government components could be measured and to which they could be tailored. To function properly as constituting authorized direction, these guidelines should be reviewed and endorsed at at least the 40 Committee level and preferably at the NSC level. A draft example of what such a set of guidelines might look like is outlined in the remainder of this memorandum.

6. Objectives -- The overall objective of the psychological/propaganda offensive here envisioned is to persuade the Hanoi leadership to abandon its strategy of pursuing its political ambitions through armed struggle. This is obviously an ideal goal not likely to be achieved by propaganda or psychological warfare alone. Nonetheless, the offensive should endeavor by all means possible to persuade the leadership that the costs of its present strategy will inevitably far exceed any benefits likely to be gained therefrom and, simultaneously, to diminish the Vietnamese Communist Party's ability to persist in its present strategy. In more specific terms, this offensive would have the following objectives:

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- a. Persuading the top Communist leadership that its current policies are not working and that continued reliance on armed struggle can only produce ever more costly failure.
- b. Exacerbating such tensions and rivalries as already exist within the top echelons of the Vietnamese Communist Party with the aim of reducing the Politburo's capacity for effective action as a decision making or control exercising institution.
- c. Increasing doubts, disaffection and splits within the Party structure in North Vietnam and lowering the morale of Party cadre in all factions.
- d. Driving a wedge between the Communist Party and the general population of North Vietnam.
- e. Increasing disaffection, discouragement and war weariness among the general population of North Vietnam. The object here is not to incite revolt, but to make the population increasingly aware of and disenchanted with the human and other costs of the Politburo's present policies, increasingly resentful of bearing continued or additional burdens, and increasingly reluctant to provide non-coerced support for the war.
- f. Exacerbating whatever tensions and reciprocal suspicions already exist between Hanoi and its senior field commands in the south, e. g. , COSVN.
- g. Stimulating doubts and concerns among the field leadership in the south over Hanoi's constancy, its willingness or ability to provide continued support, and the risks of Hanoi's writing off the sacrifices of the southern apparatus to further parochial North Vietnamese political ends.
- h. Exacerbating and compounding already developing tensions and disharmony between Northerners and Southerners within the political apparatus in South Vietnam.
- i. Increasing defeatism, discouragement and war weariness at all levels of the Communists' military and political apparatus in South Vietnam.

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7. Targets and Authorized Themes -- Achieving objectives such as those outlined above will require concentration on specific target groups and the use of specific themes appropriate to each such group. A suggested list of targets is given below with appropriate major themes grouped under each target.

a. The Hanoi Politburo

(1) The continuing cost of the war is too great for North Vietnam to accept. Prolongation of the armed struggle prejudices North Vietnam's future and will endanger the Communist Party's control over its people.

(2) Continued insistence on "victory" is futile. The GVN is growing progressively stronger, not weaker, and domestic pressures are simply not going to force the U.S. Government to surrender or accept a settlement that is tantamount to thinly disguised surrender. The U.S. Government, however, is genuinely interested in finding a reasonable solution to the conflict.

(3) Where operationally possible, the suspicions of the major contenders for power vis-a-vis their colleagues and putative rivals should be actively stimulated.

b. The Party Apparatus (Military and Civil) in North Vietnam

(1) In the aftermath of Ho's death, the Lao Dong leadership has lost its sense of purpose and its competence to lead. The surviving members of the Politburo are not noble patriots but ambitious functionaries. They are interested primarily in personal rivalries, the vindication or concealment of past errors of policy judgment or decision, and their own selfish interests. They do not merit continued support. Those struggling for power are perfectly willing to sell out the Vietnamese people to the Chinese or the Russians in the interest of their own personal advancement.

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(2) The Politburo has lied to the Party cadre and the masses and consistently tried to deceive them about the true state of the war, the struggle in the south, and the realities of world politics that affect the war. There are major splits within the Politburo over policies and priorities, particularly on the issue of waging war in the south at the expense of the interests and needs of the people of North Vietnam.

(3) Those sent from the north to "liberate" the south have not been and will not be met with open arms by the South Vietnamese people. Instead they have been and will be fiercely resisted and will be regarded as alien aggressors by the people.

(4) The war is going badly in the south and has been going badly ever since the disastrous lost gamble of the bloody attacks of Tet Mau Than. The southern government is getting stronger month by month. The Hanoi Politburo's answer to two years of failure, however, is to pour more lives and treasure into the execution of its bankrupt failing policies. The Politburo wastes the cadre and peoples' lives because its selfish members would rather see their comrades die than lose face by admitting their errors.

(5) The American Government is not seriously harassed by domestic protest over Vietnam. Those who view the American scene in terms of 1953-1954 France are living in a foolish world of dreams. The American Government is curtailing its direct involvement in the struggle and doing so in cooperative, harmonious coordination with the Saigon Government. This curtailment is possible because of two factors the Party's leaders have never dared admit to either the cadre or the people:

a. The Americans are not imperialist, have no desire to make Vietnam a neo-colony, and are anxious to leave as soon as they are sure the South Vietnamese people can protect themselves from having their political choices dictated by North Vietnamese arms.

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b. The South Vietnamese people and their government are getting progressively stronger and, hence, have a constantly diminishing need for direct American assistance.

(6) The cost of the war in terms of lives and in economic terms is already so great that North Vietnam will require at least a decade to recover. Prolonged continuation of the war will postpone North Vietnam's recovery beyond the lifetime of all cadre who are not killed in the foolish struggle. But the war and its attendant costs to North Vietnam could end at once if the Party's leaders would only abandon their vainglorious ambitions and bring all the northern cadre home to rebuild their own country rather than squander them in a futile effort to impose a political structure the South Vietnamese people do not want and will fight to the death.

(7) The people of South Vietnam cannot be coerced into accepting socialism and continued efforts to employ armed coercion can only prolong the war. The constant drain of ceaseless armed struggle will blight any hope of real progress toward socialism in the north. The only hope of convincing the southerners of the advantages of socialism lies in stopping armed aggression and allowing the northern cadre to devote their energies to building a socialist state in their homeland capable of attracting uncoerced admiration from southern compatriots.

c. The North Vietnamese People

(1) The Party leadership's greatest political vulnerability probably lies in the fact that the people of North Vietnam have already paid an exceptionally heavy price for the Politburo's pursuit of its political goals in the south and the Politburo, as yet, has relatively little to show in the way of concrete returns on this staggering investment of human lives and economic dislocation. Furthermore, the people of North Vietnam do not yet realize how great the price they have collectively paid has actually been. Throughout the length and breadth of North Vietnam, people in towns, villages and hamlets are, of course, aware of sons, relatives, neighbors

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and friends who have gone south and not yet returned. They are not yet aware, however, of how many of these will never return. Collective popular ignorance in North Vietnam of the true human (and other) costs of this war is a time bomb that could blow up in the Politburo's face. This bomb can be defused only by a victory so dramatic and clear cut that the Politburo can credibly herald it as vindication of all the sacrifice that achieving this victory entailed. Thus propaganda and psychological warfare targetted against the North Vietnamese people should concentrate on:

- a. Making them aware of the price they have already paid for the Party leadership's political ambitions.
- b. Convincing them that the kind of victory that could vindicate even past sacrifices simply cannot be attained.
- c. Persuading them that these horrendous and futile sacrifices will inevitably continue until the Politburo and Party can be pressured into stopping the war and letting the people of North Vietnam get on in peace with the task of rebuilding their own shattered land. The fathers, sons and brothers of the North Vietnamese people should no longer be squandered in hostile southern jungles. They should be brought home where they belong to live and work in peace.

d. NVA Troops and Party Cadres En Route to South Vietnam

Infiltrating troops and Party cadres on the move toward South Vietnam through southern North Vietnam and through Laos constitutes a special target group susceptible to themes stressing:

- (1) The hazards of the journey.
- (2) The fact that the infiltrators have been systematically lied to about the reception they will receive. Those who survive the journey will be fiercely resisted by the people of South Vietnam, not welcomed as liberators.

(3) Those who survive the trip will soon find out how badly the war is going. Most of them will die unnoted and alone and will be left to rot in unmarked, untended graves unknown to their families and relatives and far from the tombs of their ancestors.

(4) The only way to survive the holocaust that awaits them is to desert en route or surrender to the lenient allies at their first opportunity in South Vietnam.

e. The Officers Who Staff COSVN and the Senior Regional Commands

(1) The Party leadership in Hanoi is weak, rent by strife, and beset by personal rivalries and jealousies in the aftermath of Ho's death.

(2) The needs and aspirations of the southern organization will inevitably take a poor second place to the personal ambitions of those who seek to assume Ho's mantle of power.

(3) The Hanoi leadership is quite prepared to sell the southern organization down the river and write off all its past hardships and sacrifices to further narrow North Vietnamese regional interests. The Politburo did this in the 1940s and in 1954. It may soon do so again.

(4) Thus further sacrifices in support of the southern organizations Hanoi masters are vain, futile and pointless.

f. Northerners Fighting in VC/NVA Military Forces or Working in the Communist Political Structure in South Vietnam

(1) As you can see, the southern cadre are lazy, cowardly and untrustworthy.

(2) You do not have the support of the South Vietnamese people, who will continue to resist you as alien invaders, which is the role your selfish masters are forcing you to play.

(3) Your own leaders in the north are prepared to abandon you to your fate in South Vietnam. If you continue

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to fight, you will probably die, will never see your family or loved ones again and your family and ancestors will never know what happened to you.

g. Southern VC Military and Political Cadre

(1) The growing use of North Vietnamese Army fillers in Viet Cong main force units is further evidence that Hanoi has relegated southern participation in the war to a minor role. The continued influx of NVA troops will result in more leadership positions being assumed by northerners. A northern accent is clearly a prerequisite for positions of authority.

(2) Increased use of NVA security officers within VC units to offset southern ralliers to the GVN is clear evidence that the south no longer has a voice in the conduct of the war.

(3) Continued manipulation of southerners in political organizations created by Hanoi demonstrates that southern aspirations are not relevant in Hanoi's eyes in the struggle. The Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces, the Peoples Revolutionary Government, Liberation Committees and the unclear position today of the NLF all point to an opportunistic Hanoi policy aimed at a settlement -- or a long, protracted war -- as it suits northern interests.

8. Negative Considerations -- There is no intention of mounting a program directed at the populace in the north that is designed to produce a coordinated uprising. Nor, given our knowledge of population control in the DRV, is this even a likely possibility. By bringing the cost of the war and the prospect of continued sufferings to the individual's consciousness, we would hope to see a malaise evolve that would mean a personal distaste for continued prosecution of the war and would complicate the leadership's ability to carry on the struggle.

9. Political Diplomatic Offensive -- The sympathetic reception that the Communist propaganda efforts have received worldwide throughout the war has continued to surround the Paris talks. World public information media -- and some governments as well -- often seem to have a blurred vision of the negotiations and seem inclined to portray the U.S. as the

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activist party stimulating combat on the battlefield and the intransigent party blocking progress at the negotiating table. The GVN has made little -- if any -- progress on the public relations and diplomatic fronts. In the propaganda and psychological warfare field, particularly in the international arena, the GVN has taken a drubbing from its Communist adversaries, who have had considerable success in peddling the line that the GVN is nothing but a narrow coterie of selfish, U.S.-supported reactionary generals whose intransigence constitutes the principal obstacle to peace. In light of the initial success of the Vietnamization program, the blatancy of North Vietnamese aggression in Laos, and the fact that the long-suffering Cambodians have recently erupted in spontaneous protest over Hanoi's cynical, aggressive exploitation of their territory, the climate of world opinion may be susceptible to change if a vigorous, imaginative program can be developed by the U.S. and the GVN.

a. The most dramatic story to be told is an unveiling of the sequence of concessions which the U.S. has made at Paris. The refrain that the DRV would "know what to do" if the bombing were halted and the "understanding" on the shelling of the cities and the subsequent Communist actions is a telling story. Unfortunately, its sharpness has been lost in the months of inactivity in the negotiations.

b. In 1966 a large group of Ambassadors, accredited to Saigon but resident elsewhere in Asia, were given an extensive tour of South Vietnam. Repetition of this tour is overdue.

c. The DRV's disproportionate role in the "southern" war; its callous refusal to admit its presence in the south by accepting its wounded for repatriation; the stories told by northerners who have surrendered -- these and numerous others are valid themes that have suffered from our buckshot approach to propaganda in support of Vietnam. A concise indictment, free from special pleading, would lend itself to White Paper treatment.

d. A continuing program of encouraging visits to South Vietnam of political leaders and opinion moulders from around the world could be very useful, particularly if these guests of the GVN were really permitted to see and say whatever they wished. The creation of a group of

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reasonably accurate and credible reporters with influence in their own countries would probably do far more to get the GVN's story across than any actions Saigon's own Foreign Service and Information Ministry is likely to take.

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